

## *How Alaska is Unique*

### **What is the subsistence lifestyle?**

In Alaska, subsistence generally refers to the practice of taking fish, wildlife or other wild resources for one's sustenance - for food, shelter or other personal or family needs. Subsistence is the physical taking of resources as well as the spiritual connection to the land and tradition that is maintained when users practice this lifestyle.

Subsistence has been elemental to Alaska Natives and their cultures for thousands of years. It also has become a way of life for many non-Natives in Alaska. Subsistence is recognized by the United States and by the State of Alaska as the highest-priority consumptive use of resources in the state.

Subsistence hunting and fishing provide a large share of the food supply in rural Alaska. According to the state Division of Subsistence, about 44 million pounds of wild foods are taken annually by residents of rural Alaska, or about 375 pounds per person per year. This compares to 22 pounds per year harvested by Alaska's urban residents. Fish comprise 60 percent of subsistence foods taken annually. Ninety-five percent of rural households consume subsistence-caught fish, according to the state.

Subsistence is a controversial political topic because managing subsistence involves making decisions about who has access to Alaska's valuable fish and wildlife resources. Disagreements about subsistence arise between and within different groups, including urban and rural Alaska residents, Natives and non-Natives, subsistence users and non-subsistence users, state lawmakers and other groups. Disagreements include who should get rights to subsistence, how resources are allocated under subsistence provisions, and how such decisions are made.

### **What makes Alaska Unique?**

- Rural Alaska is more remote and inaccessible than most lower 48 rural communities. Access is primarily through small aircraft which greatly inhibits frequency, duration, and ability to get in and out of communities. Airfare can range from \$100-1000 (from Anchorage to remote communities). Weather and increased risk factors also have a major affect on travel within Alaska.
- The cost of living for items like groceries, fuel, and energy can also be 3-5 times higher than in urban areas. This extreme cost pared with poverty /unemployment rates makes maintaining a life in rural Alaska much more difficult than in an urban area.
- There are 229 Alaska Tribes which makes up 41% of the nation's total of 565.
- Alaska has the longest salmon run in the world...2,000 miles up the Yukon River.
- Alaska has no state income tax and pays every qualifying resident a "dividend" annually that is generated from the State revenues brought in from mineral royalties and other investments.
- The federal government owns approximately 60% of the total area (222 of 375 million acres) of Alaska. 56 million acres of the federally owned lands are Designated Wilderness

### **What makes Alaska Tribes different than other Tribes in the Lower 48?**

**Lacking Treatment as a State (TAS) designation:** Alaska Tribes do not have TAS status due to their lack of federal reservation land/status and are not able to receive many of the EPA grants they would be eligible if they had TAS.

Alaska Natives' unique land status is due to an economic model that was passed by Congress in 1971, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act - ANCSA, which established Native Corporations rather than reservations as a way of settling aboriginal land claims between the United States and Alaska Natives. The settlement extinguished Alaska Native claims to the land by transferring titles to twelve Alaska Native regional corporations and over 200 local village corporations.

**Tribal size is smaller:** In general Alaska Tribes are also smaller in member numbers than lower 48 Tribes. This small membership paired with recent designated as federal Tribes (most within the last 40 years) and extreme remoteness has led to a lack of infrastructure and variance in management capabilities. Alaska Tribes did not appear on the Department of Interior's List of Federally Recognized Tribes until 1993. The list was confirmed by Congress in 1994 by the Tribe List Act.

**Gaming:** Alaska Tribes do not have the option of implementing gaming as an economic opportunity. Most Native lands in Alaska are not held in the status required by the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act upon which casinos may be operated. There are no casinos in Alaska, and will not likely be in the foreseeable future.

**Treaties:** There are no treaties with Tribes in Alaska. Treaty making ended in 1871

**Language:** In some areas the Native language is the primary language used, and interpreters are necessary for extensive communication. The speech pattern among many Alaska Natives incorporates long pauses which are used for gathering thoughts, much longer than is generally comfortable in the non-Native way of speaking. People unaccustomed to this speech pattern often "break in" to the conversation before the speaker is actually finished.

**Tribal Law:** Tribes in Alaska have well developed unwritten traditional values and practices. However, the vast majority of tribes in Alaska are just beginning the development of written tribal law in terms of tribal codes/ordinances. About 25% of tribes have written constitutions, but few ordinances.

**Tribal recognition by the State of Alaska:** The State of Alaska does not formally recognize tribal governments as an authority and thus does not consult or recognize them as a government.

### **Key Alaska terminology or hot button words not to say**

- **Native:** can often be interpreted as either Alaska Native (indigenous person) or Native Alaskan (someone who is from Alaska but could be of non-indigenous background). To be safe good to advise management that when they refer to Tribal/indigenous heritage to use the term "Alaska Native", this is inverted in other states such as California so often times people who travel to AK think they are being respectful by referring to indigenous people as Native Alaskan but it comes across as unknowing. Alaska is home to several distinct cultures of indigenous peoples including Indians, coastal Inuit, and Aleut people. The term "Alaska Native" or "Native" are used in place

of the word "Indian" to include all indigenous people in Alaska.

- **Correct reference for aboriginal/indigenous person is: Alaska Native**
- Sometimes the word "Village" is used in exchange for the word "Tribe". A village describes the location where the Tribe resides. It is not correct to refer to an Alaska Tribal government as a village. We have a Federal Trust relationship with the Tribal government, not with a village.
- Tribal Governments bodies in Alaska may be called "Traditional Councils", "Native Councils", "Village Councils", Tribal Councils", or "IRA Councils".
- Confusion over "Indian Country" and whether Alaska has any: The legal term "Indian Country" usually is understood to apply when reservations are in place but the legal definition of Indian Country also includes "...dependent Indian communities, and Indian allotments (trust and restricted) lands"...therefore Alaska Native Villages fall within this definition and the intention of the term Indian Country. There are also allotment and trust lands in Alaska. There is still a lot of legal misunderstanding surrounding the term "Indian Country" and how it can/should be applied in Alaska.